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TWO DISCOURSES

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REVIEW AND CRITICISM.

BY
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A Review of Three Months.

ZION CHURCH, Montreal, 30th September, 1883.

I have announced myself to speak to you to-night in review of what has taken place and been discussed during the last three or four months in England. Year by year, after my return from what has become an annual trip, I do this. Generally much criticism of a more or less carping kind follows. Some newspaper writers complain that I secularize the pulpit, and go out of my way to be sensational; but a somewhat prolonged acquaintance with these writers, and an intimate knowledge of their personal, or rather impersonal, judgment, have taught me not to attach much value to their criticisms. For I find that after all, sermons must bear on living subjects—they must have reference to the infinite *now* in which we live and move and have our being. The preacher should be a prophet expounding what is, and predicting what must result, if certain lines are followed as to the guidance of public and private affairs. I do not deny that what is called doctrinal preaching is good in its way; I am sure it is. Even controversial discourses serve a great purpose and do permanent good; but a practical review of men and things as they are is also necessary, that we may have an understanding of the times in which we live. And we, here in this great colony, are bound by affection and interest to regard with careful consideration all those great and varying factors which go to make up the complex life of England. England is yet the nerve centre of the Anglo Saxon race. We are dependent upon her in more ways than we suspect. Her social life is reflected; her profound love of freedom is our noblest heritage; her p[illegible] institutions are our models; her great men and women of past a[illegible]resent, are our pride and exemplars; we are more than a colony, we are a copy of the mother country. We look to England as the home of intellectual activity. We know a little of the brilliance of the French mind, and the depth and patience of German thinking; but, my judgment may be warped by prejudices, to mind, we must still look to England to take the lead in all social and intellectual affairs. But the question has

been forced home upon me this year, as never before: how long is that to last? will this grand position of pre-eminence be maintained?

I think it is Bacon who said, that when a nation turns from arms to commerce, it may be taken as proof of national decadence. I do not exactly endorse the sentiment, for it admits too much. No sober thinking man can approve the policy of France or Russia to-day, nor the state of things which keeps Germany armed to the teeth. No nation can do wisely in spending its life strength in the worship of Mars. The god of battles is always on the side of dry powder and big battalions, and the capricious deity makes large demands upon the industrious poor. But then, it is just as disastrous for a people to devote itself to merely Mammon and muscle. And that, it seems to me, is just what the English people are doing. There are no theological discussions now; orthodoxy quietly hates heterodoxy, and heterodoxy quietly sneers at orthodoxy, but both agree that open rupture entails too much trouble. Science has but little to say, and the few words it now and then utters sound in dull unheeding ears. That huge body called the British public, is an investor of money, and the main enquiry is where the most interest can be got. To my thinking, the English people are growing intensly selfish in this matter. They regard themselves as the only authorized money makers in the universe. It has got to be that the main idea of political institutions, of Royalty, Lords and Commons, of army and navy, is to protect and further the interest of British commerce. All nations who will not accept the British commercial economy are written down as fools and worse. When the Suez Canal was but a project in the brain of a brilliant French engineer, the English nation, with many a hard blow, sought to beat it into nothingness; when Beaconsfield turned the nation into a stockholder, even his followers seemed half ashamed; but the other day in England, to judge from the excited meetings held, and the tall talk in the papers, you would have thought the world had formed a project to rob England of her rights. There was small recognition of the French engineer who had conceived and carried out the scheme in spite of English opposition; and when English statesmen endeavoured to concede what they judged were the rights of others, English commerce rose *en masse* in violent protest, and the Government yielded to the storm. The argument was simple: the canal is a paying concern; British commerce makes it pay; therefore we must own that canal or another along side of it, so as to protect British interests. That is only an illustration of British

temper about money. And a sad temper I think it is. Mammon is indeed lord of the ascendant. Nobility of birth, education in the classics, literature, science and art, are all giving way before this upstart god of money. A young country like our own may be excused for holding Mammon in high esteem. If our rich men are our only aristocrats, we may well be pardoned the small conceit, for we have a hope and prospect of climbing beyond the level of money's throne, where art, science, literature, personal worth, manly righteousness, reach by gradient into the heaven of Godliness; but when an old country of settled institutions and ways, turns from all that is lofty and ennobling to the mere seeking and worship of money, then that country has entered upon a period of decadence which must end in night and nothingness. What is a man who gives himself to money grubbing? His mind is a calculating machine—his conscience a ledger—the interest table is his paternoster, his decalogue and creed—his heart is dead and damned—the heavens have no glory for him—those gorgeous diagrams of fire that all night long blaze in the calm infinite blue, have no power to kindle a high and manly aspiration in his soul; no angel visions come to bless his dreaming; he thinks and dreams but of buying and selling and rates of interest. His life is not up, it is down—it is not developement, it is decadence—the dry rot is there and working it way down to the roots. And so it is with a people. Where love and worship of Mammon absorb attention and affection—where worth is judged by the standard of money—where nobility of character and force of brain and culture are reckoned as nothing by the side of bags of money, then that people have entered upon a period of decadence; their greatness must soon be destroyed, and the days of their power are numbered. England to-day is producing nothing great. A great man or two still move in the world of politics, but they made their greatness a generation ago; and when they are gone, who will take their place? Poetry is silent, and even the Laureate can but feebly sing a feeble, "Hands all round," or write a play the public will not welcome. Science is doing nothing at all, but only harking back on past adventures and achievements. The Royal Academy of Painting is dull and common place; the machinery of Parliament has broken down under the pressure of vulgar self-assertion—the ears of the people are filled with the dull chink of money. Men transcend their piles of gold and silver, and swelter there in the blaze of the sun of prosperity, or sink into the nothingness and burden of poverty. Oh! England,

land of my love—so glorious in history—so great in possibilities—so noble once in purpose ; God save thee from the degrading and damning rule of Mammon.

One other thing I have noticed as marking a decadence—year by year I have seen it grow—attention to mere muscular sports. The daily press may always be taken as reflecting public opinion—their one and simple aim is not to create opinion, but report it, they furnish the supply demanded by the market. Time was the great dailies generally and at length discussed and criticised questions of public and international importance ; news of literary stuff was relegated to small print in an obscure corner ; but now, all that is changed. Take up a London paper and you will find column after column devoted to reports of cricket matches, with histories of batsmen and analyses of bowling ; lawn tennis commands much attention ; also byciclying and trycicling, and every other form of amusement known to the British public. Let it be understood, I am not an ascetic nor prophet of asceticism ; I am a firm believer in the utility of healthy outdoor sports. I am sure that they are opposed to meaness and what is unmanly ; they develop the body and give a healthy tone to the mind. I do not even say that in England there is too much of this practised, but what I do say is that public attention is concentrated upon it over much. Little is heard of mind, but a great deal of muscle. I am a diligent reader of newspapers, and I couldn't tell you who has passed the most successful examination at Oxford or Cambridge, or Eton or Harvard ; but I could tell you who are the crack batsmen of either university or school. I can tell you who exhibited a skilful defence, who hit brilliantly, and whose bowling analysis stands best. Sermons never, by any chance, get reported ; lectures, even the most popular, are cushed into ten lines when noticed at all ; foreign telegrams are not much thought of ; parliamentary debates are boiled down to the lowest extracts ; but every hit a cricketer makes is chronicled—and every public game of lawn tennis, and all the marvellous doings of that lately developed and most interesting raceof people, riders on two or three wheels, with no horse. You may think I am carping and hypercritical, but, believe me, one cannot take a glance at the main features of English life without being struck with the prominence given to the achievements of muscle. A good runner is better known and appreciated than a good writer ; a cricket match will draw more thousands than the most learned of lectures will draw

scores. Science of muscle is more thought of than science of mind. Robert Browning is not so well known as Lord Harris, or Steel, or Barlow; and, when a great man died, to whom I shall refer by-and-bye, the daily press gave him less space than it gave to the winner of the Derby. And I think I am bound to take that fact as indicating a national decadence. It is good to cultivate the muscle of youth, but it is not good to do that at the expense of mind culture. I am glad to see young men indulging in outdoor manly sports, but I want to see that that they have also a care for books—an inclination to store their mind with the facts of history and the laws of life. A sound mind in a sound body is a happy union of forces, but a sound body with no mind in it at all, is a poor thing for all else but show. Undue prominence given to these things can but indicate a falling off in the mental activities, and a decadence of intellectual strength. And, after all, a nation is built up, guided and sustained in power by its thinkers, and not by its sportsmen. England has not been made by its skill in cricket, by its racers and runners, but by brain power—by students of art and science and political economy—by patient philosophers and earnest statesmen—by speakers, and readers and writers; and, if the public have taken to neglecting these in order to give the more honour to men of heels and arms, then the intellectual force of the nation must pass into a state of decay, and, unless a change be brought about, I am certain England will not hold her proud prominence among the thinking nations of the world.

Something more I want to speak of as unhealthy, and giving no promise of good. The English are a theatre-loving and theatre-going people, and, so far as I can judge, noting things year after year, the taste is degenerating. But rarely can you see a good and healthy piece advertised; but rarely is a play commended for its moral teaching. The most popular theatres are those where women are on exhibition, or where society songs, of questionable morality, are sung; or where the spectacular display is most gorgeous. One single exception I am bound to note and name—for one man has most nobly fought against the pollutions of the public mind by way of the stage. He has demonstrated that the threatre need not be a hell, nor the way to hell. By industry, by the force of genius, by honesty of purpose, by purity of motive, by insisting on clean surroundings, Henry Irving has earned and gained, and proudly wears the gratitude of what is cultured, liberal and noble in British society. Irving is a great and

patient preacher. Shakespeare never yet did harm, and the man who can rescue people from the contamination of mere society plays and sensational dramas, and give them a taste for having nature mirrored before their eyes in all her changing moods—her stormy skies and sunny landscapes—is well deserving of praise. Close the theatres you cannot. In a healthy community it will exist—I think it must exist—because it meets the demands made by some of the most powerful of our natural instincts. Exist it ever will, and the simple question is, how and in what condition? It may easily be made an outer-chamber of hell. Let respectable people keep away; let parents forbid their children from going, until the children become their own masters; let fanatical preachers rave against it in a wholesale manner, and that way the audience will be low, and demand that the stage come down to its level; and the demand will be met, and the stage will promote what is brutal, and your children and all society will suffer because of the evil. On the other hand, demand that the stage shall, at least, not teach immorality —shall not pander to what is low and vulgar in humanity. Shun an unclean drama as you would an unclean book or the devil. Teach young men and women to discriminate and choose only what is good and elevated, and society will soon drag the stage up after it, until the stage begins to react upon society, and give it benediction. The theatre in England to-day presents a strange appearance. There is that general demand for the spectacular, which even Irving has had to recognise; there is the demand for what is merely sensational and often vulgar, and yet it has been demonstrated that the legitimate drama pure and good, is acceptable, when industry, honesty and genius combine to put it before the people. That is in proof that in society there is the right kind of material to work upon, when the right kind of men and women take the work in hand. And the right kind of men and women will take it in hand, if society will respond and help them. As the demand is, so will the supply be, as can well be seen there in England. The lesson is big and plain before us. Let us purify the theatre by going to it in pure-mindedness; let us demand purity in the auditorium, on the stage, and behind the scenes; let us respect what is respectable, and not condemn a class for the sins of a few. The calling of an actor is honest and respectable in the nature of it, and we should recognise the fact. It was a fitting thing that, at that Banquet given to Irving in London—where the notabilities of England's birth and culture and goodness were represented—the Lord Chief-Justice should take the Chair.

The influence it had upon the country was noble and powerful. Not an actor on all the group of islands but felt that the calling had been honored, and that self-respect would command reward—not one but looked upon his profession with clearer perception of its public value and meaning, and I trust that such an upward impetus has been given to the general stage, as shall rescue it from the threatening danger of sinking into the bottomless black of unrelieved vulgarity.

I put it down in my programme to speak of some controversies now raging in Scotland, but I cannot dwell upon them from lack of time. They present a quaint aspect of life, of course, as most things Scottish do. Light and modern ideas travel but slowly toward the Highlands of Scotland. I took a run into Scotland and found the Scottish mind exercised over modes of conveyance on Communion Sunday. From out that antique quarter of the world, where only the Gaelic tongue has power to charm, came eager protests against the "puffing fiend." Parents solemnly affirmed that they could not hope to save their children from hell, even with a firm grip upon the doctrine of election to help them, if such an infernal devil as a railway engine should go panting over the rails on Sunday. And then it came out that those Communion Sundays were marked by sundry eccentricities of conduct, not always pleasant to contemplate. For example: the Highlander finds that travelling on Sunday is very dry work, and he accepts the dogma that man cannot live by bread alone; so he freely indulges in the dram before the service, to prepare him to agree with the minister about the degeneracy of the age; and after the preaching further drams to keep the mind steady on the work of reflection. It also came out that the lovers of Communion, whose piety was so sensitive that it cried out in fear at the sight of a railway train on Sunday, were in the habit of making their own whiskey, and racing their horses under the influence of it on their way home from Communion. I will not dwell on the thing; it is a phase of life we know very well. It is amusing as we see it there in Scotland—so quaint, so antique—the people are so like unto children; but, you may shift the scene, and see the same in other form; a great and prominent professor of religion—champion of the orthodox creed—a regular attendant at the church—hates all heresy and heretics—is a pattern as to total abstinence; in the church is a bigot—in commerce a thief—in social circles a liar and slanderer—in the house an ill-tempered devil—so what can you say? poor Highlanders, with your medley of Communion and drams and racing, and you

professors at Montreal and other enlightened centres, you do strain at a gnat and you *can* swallow a camel.

But let me call to your mind how sad the last three or four months have been, because of the work death has done, and how powerful the lessons taught us. The first news that reached us on landing was of that terrible Sunderland disaster, when hundreds of children were beaten into lifeless pulp by their mates. Scarcely had the wild wail of Sunderland mothers ceased to fill our ears than came news of Cholera raging in Africa and threatening Europe; then hurtling thro' the air came the grim message that beautiful Ischia had swallowed up and destroyed its own inhabitants; while the hot tears were blinding us came tidings which drove them back upon the brain again, for no honest man dared weep when the news of Carey's death was about, for fear any should think he was weeping for a scoundrel that deserved nor place nor name among men; and then came the slaughter by fire at Java, when 75,000 souls were crushed into the eternal silence. All stood aghast at the strange and great harvests death was gathering in—and then came news of a death which gave point and meaning to all the lessons the tragic days were forcing home upon us. Robert Moffat had died; that herculean frame had yielded at last to the ravages of time – that brain, so long active in the philosophy of goodness, had ceased to command thought, for the fire had burnt itself out. Then we remembered how this brave, good, grand Scotch Christian, with soul inflamed with love to God and men, had gone out to Africa, and with a brave good wife to help him, had traversed deserts, and plunged into jungles—had fought his way through beasts and fevers, and heathendom—had met hunger by taking in his belt a hole or two; and all to seek and save the souls of men—to save them to civilization, and to truth, to righteousness and God. This man, in all the grandeur of his great example, stood out before us again—a man to be copied—a man to seek and find inspiration from—a man to be named with the magnificent Xavier, and the gentle, cultured Thomas Acquinas—aye, a man to be called a very apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Manhood was honoured by the manly life of Robert Moffat. Christianity was better vindicated and justified by his word and work than by scores of tomes of learned argument and subtle disquisition. And the lesson of his life went home to thousands of hearts, winged with light and beauty from the glory of his character; the lesson that a good life is worth living; that in self-sacrifice is immortal honour; that it is better to die respected

than rich; that devotion to God and man is more noble than devotion to Mammon. Learn that great lesson my brothers, and make covenant with God and his Christ that you will bind yourselves with steadfast purpose unto duty; that in faith, truth and love you will ennoble your own life, bless the world of humanity, and glorify your God.

PREACHING AND SERMONS.

ZION CHURCH, MONTREAL, 7TH OCTOBER, 1883.

I have called the subject of my discourse to-night Preaching and Sermons. My object is to clearly define, to myself and to you, what I mean by the terms, and to say what I conceive the preacher's function to be. And I use the two words, Preaching and Sermons, because of some general criticism which has been passed, declaring that a certain kind of preaching does not produce sermons, but only essays or lectures. There is a pretty wide-spread notion among church-goers as to what a sermon should be, and any departure from the lines marked out by that notion is deprecated or disowned, according to the temper of the critic. Let us see how this has come about.

It may very well be said that the Christian era introduced preaching into the world. True, the Prophets of Israel were preachers; they made proclamation of righteousness—they criticised, they condemned, they denounced, they implored in the great name of Jehovah. But they were not stated and appointed preachers; they were not a class set apart and consecrated to a special office and work, as the priests were. Their cry often startled the people, for it broke upon them like thunder from a clear sky; when they were most self-satisfied—most intoxicated by their own wantonness, then came the Prophet's warning or rebuke, crashing through the noises of their rioting and sin. That done, and the preacher's work for the time was done—duty fulfilled, he went back to work or prayer. The last of the Prophets was the first regular preacher. John the Baptist undertook to inaugurate a social and moral revolution; by great and startling sermons he heralded a greater than himself. Jesus Christ was essentially a preacher; He preached to the Jews, to his times, and adopted all the true methods which the true preacher must always adopt to reach and influence the hearts of his hearers. Peter was a preacher, so also was John—so was Stephen, and, in a still greater degree, was Paul. But after their day preaching was not so much cultivated; a few of the great

fathers shine out in the centuries—the silver-tongued Chrysostom and others—but even most of those were theologians rather than preachers, and set themselves to define or defend doctrines, rather than to exercise any moral and religious influence upon the public mind and heart. As the church became richer and firmer in its hold upon the popular reverence, preaching became less and less thought of, and the sacraments, and grace for man through them, more and more prominent. While the Roman Catholic Church has given birth and development to a few great preachers, it has not developed a class of preachers, because, as I have said, the church is sacramental. But, with the protest of Luther and his fellow Protestants, came preaching; it was a necessity of the hour. There was an emergency which could only be met by the living voice in fiery eloquence, protesting for human rights and personal liberty, against the grinding tyranny of institutions and organizations and castes and classes. Preaching established the Reformation. But our reforming fathers, dazzled, perhaps, by the exceeding glory of their great work, sought at first to develop Protestantism by means of sermonizing. They succeeded for a time, but, by-and-bye, preaching got to be painfully wearisome in its reiteration of well-known doctrines and the platitudes of morality, and gradually, but very surely, the church became again sacramental in its modes of worship and mechanical in its methods for reaching the souls of men to stir religious emotion.

The Puritan movement brought preaching into prominence again. By that movement the Protestant Church was divided into two branches, the Episcopal and the Nonconformist as it is called. The Episcopal Church is mainly sacramental. I say mainly, because, while in great centres of population she encourages preaching—while she pays most marked respect to eloquence and fervour—while she is careful to promote great preachers to commanding positions, she lays most stress upon her sacramental services. The sacraments are the life and glory of the English Church, and preaching is but an adjunct. But the Puritan movement has been a long-continued effort to carry out the real ideas and principles of Protestantism. For long it turned a stern uncompromising face toward all but the simplest sacraments—it would have none of ornate display—no appeal to eye or ear—only the beauty or thunder of doctrines. It partially succeeded, but only

partially; for gradually it was learned that preaching was not enough, except when preachers were exceptional, because of brilliance of imagination or beauty of diction. Puritanism has not been able to hold its own, for it could not fill every pulpit with a great, even a uniformly interesting preacher. Fathers and mothers kept their pews from loyalty of soul, no matter how the preacher halted, but the sons and daughters, having little or none of their parents fine chivalry and self-sacrifice, went off to where the service had interest for their mind or heart, or both. To meet that demand of the times the Puritan branch of the Protestant Church is making an effort to combine the sacramental with the preaching. In some antique places, where the human mind develops slowly, a determined stand is made against the movement, and there are still congregations where organs are not tolerated, although I believe the choir leader is allowed the use of the sacred tuning-fork; but such instances only dot the area covered by the church, and, in the main, the churches are seeking to combine an ornate service with popular preaching. I think the effort is a failure, and will fail yet more disastrously—not because beautiful prayers in sublime language have failed to interest and stir the heart—not because music has lost its charms in places sacred to man's worship of God, but because that part of the service, which our people have been to regard as the essential, informing, and vitalizing force in the service, that is, the sermon, has ceased to interest, and the preaching has failed to fulfil the general expectation.

It may be that preaching has not fallen into decay; I think it has not. Sermons are as well conceived, shaped and delivered now, as ever they were; as great preachers live as ever lived; men live and speak who are as keen in intellect, as subtle to analyse, as bold in search, as eloquent of tongue, as the best men of the best days gone by. We have men as fervent in piety and as faithful in word as the christian pulpit ever knew. No, there is no decadence in the preaching, but there is a very marked decadence in sermon-liking on the part of the people. Take what are commonly understood as sermons—that is, discourses based on texts of Scripture, with their divisions and sub-divisions, their general heads and exhortation—and how much interest have they for the general congregation? Little or none at all. They are scarcely heard with attentive ears. Congregations are, on the whole,

the most dull and languid gatherings of humanities to be found upon the face of the earth. I have watched the effect of sermons upon the audiences many a time, as the preachers went on to introduce the subject, and then got to the text and unfolded its meaning, or made show of doing it, and then came the orthodox wind-up, with exhortation and invitation, which nobody minded. Not a face that I could see shone with interest; not an eye lit up with the fire of newly-kindled emotions; not a prayer was wrung from silent lips, but the people were dull as the preacher and his theme. I do not mean to say it is always so; for there are preachers of sermons who, by their fervour and strong, bright imagination, will gain the ears and minds of all who listen. Whatever genius touches becomes sublime. A candle is a dull thing; touch the wick with fire, and the candle blazes, giving light. So a congregation is a dull thing, but a genius in the pulpit will set it on fire. Only the soil of church life is too poor to grow many geniuses at a time, and we have to reckon with the ordinary and common-place, and find the net value of their work. What are sermons doing for the life of the world? Very little, it must be frankly confessed.

And why? Well, first of all, those sermons are not addressed to the times in which we live—not to the people who hear them. A man has been working hard all the week at his calling to make bread; he has heartache and headache, because of the ever-increasing burdens of life—he is anxious for his family, their present and their future; it may be that he sees calamity impending, or good fortune is beginning to smile on his working and schemes. Now what should the Sunday service be to that man? What should it do for him? Is it to soothe him? Yes, let it do that. By lofty music and loftier prayer bring a hush upon his spirit, that he may no more be perplexed by having his ears filled with the jar and jangle of the world's bread-making machinery; and then—what? Are you to wrench him away from this world of work and sin altogether? Are you to comfort him for all his self-imposed afflictions and sins of passion and pride, by telling him that if he only can and will believe certain doctrines he will have the righteousness of another ascribed to him? Are you to fill his mind with vain and vague imaginings about a heaven he really has no desire for, and a hell he is really not afraid of? Are you to tell him that he need not expect

much result from good works and noble endeavours against sin? To help him to be good and great, are you to take him back to ancient times and Oriental scenes for his examples? Well, you can do that, and that is what the orthodox preachers of sermons do. And what is the result? Dullness. A venerable divine told me a while ago that he had preached for ten years at a time without being thanked for a sermon by man, woman or child. I can very well believe it. He got just what he had stipulated for and so earned—nothing more. He had given them nothing to call out their gratitude. He had doubtless given during that time a strong moral support to the Creator, and expressed approval of creation generally; he had defended Moses, the Decalogue and Pentateuch; he had repeated the thunder of Isaiah, and unfolded the dream of Ezekiel; he had explained the personality and Godhead of Jesus Christ; he harmonised the Gospels and interpreted the Epistles; he had established the truth and beauty of all his own dogmas; he had done so much for the Church and the faith that his brethern and friends at a distance, who had no chance to hear him preach, gave him a diploma, but no man, woman nor child, during all these dreary years, took his hand and looked into his eyes and said, "Thank you; I am the stronger, and the better for that sermon." And no wonder. He had only told them what they thought they knew and had heard a thousand times before. You have heard professional guides in abbey or tower. The first time it was interesting enough, but you had to go again to take a friend, and the story was rather tame; and you had to go again to take another friend, and then you begged to be allowed to remain outside while your friend heard the story you wanted to hear no more. So it is with the general run of sermons; the much wearied hearers, metaphorically, remain outside by going to sleep, or turn the attention to something other than the preacher's subject. Speeches on politics get a hearing. I have heard most indifferent speakers loudly cheered; their logic halted just like their tongue; their argument was as disjointed as their sentences; but they were heard because they spoke to the hour and the souls there before them; they spoke of home, and not of Judea; they criticised the living; they dealt with living subjects.

There can be no really great preacher, and consequently no really great sermons, except at times of religious agitation and

revolutions. A great general is found, not in the piping time of peace, but when the thunder of war wakes the dormant soul in him. The great statesman is only made when his country is threatened or overwhelmed with disaster. So the great preacher is only possible when revolution is upon the Church—when some protest has to be launched forth in the name of God and man's rights. Luther's preaching shook the Vatican until the walls heaved apart, and cries and curses came out as the light of day went streaming in. The echoes aroused Christendom; but those sermons are tame reading now—the emergency is over. John Knox by preaching crushed Popery in Scotland and changed the face of politics, but as we read those discourses now, we barely get beyond wondering how the old man could have been so unkind to so beautiful a woman as Mary, Queen of Scots. Wesley and Whitfield were great preachers, and by their words wrought mighty things in their day. The best of their sermons would cause no sensation now. They preached to their day, and with the passing of the day passed the power of their sermons. And yet people tell us we are not to preach to our day as they did. They had the advantage of great and stirring times when words had a chance to effect something—we have the disadvantage of mean and dull times, and we are to be denied the right to preach even to them. With the example of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Jesus Christ, and Luther and Wesley before me, I am told I must not speak about politics—my discourse will not be a sermon, only a lecture or essay if I do. All such things must be left to the press. I must not say much about philosophy, nor science, nor commerce, nor social questions; I must only come with my bag of chaff, and hand out firstly, secondly and thirdly every week, just that you may comfort yourselves with the delusion that you are recognizing religion. Well, those who want chaff must go to the professional and licensed vendors of the article; only let them acknowledge that they seek after and have a liking for chaff.

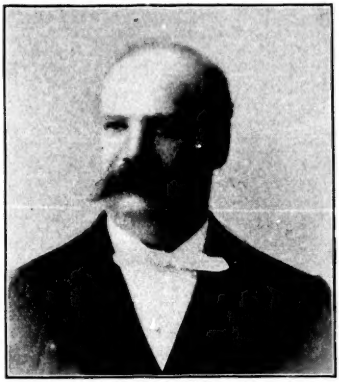
We have no great revolutions throbbing around us, but the now of life is always great with incident and surprise, and the function of the preacher is to throw a strong religious light upon that now—upon its manifold complexities and quaint perplexities—its miracles of goodness and its mysteries of pain. All the week you have looked at politics from under—from your place in the party—

from your point of commercial or social interests; now the Sabbath has come, and I want to take you up the slopes of the mountain of God's holiness, that you may see politics from over, and judge your position as the light of truth and justice flashes down upon it. I spoke just now of the jaded man in church and what he needs. He needs to look at the life he is living from a religious point of view; he needs to have the light of truth flooding his commercial transactions, so that to-morrow, when he sets his hand to the repetitions of the blundering sin, he may hear the words of condemnation ringing through the chambers of his soul; he needs help for his mind when it is struggling with great problems in the philosophy of religion; he needs to be told what visions the seer has, what is fleeting and what is permanent, enduring forever; he needs to have discussed before him, from a moral and religious point of view, those things of earth and heaven, time and eternity, which interest him because they immediately concern him. He needs those things, I say; I do not say that he wants them or demands then. The majority of churchgoers think the minister, the ideal minister, should be "a little mean man, with a little mind and a little conscience, and a little heart, and a little small soul, with a little effeminate culture got by drivelling over the words of some of humanity's noblest men—a man who never shows himself on the highways of letters, morals, business, science, politics, where thought, well girt for toil, marches forth to more than kingly victory, but now and then moves round in the parlours of society, smiling upon the mean as upon the good, because the pew rent of the evil will go just as far in housekeeping as that of the good, and sneaks up and down the aisles of the church, and crawls into the pulpit to lift an unctuous face to heaven, and then, with the words and example of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Jesus before him, under his very eye, in a small voice whines out his worthless stuff, which does but belittle the exiguity of soul which appropriately sleeps beneath in the pews, not beneath him in spirit, only below him in space. I know men who want such a minister, who will "Preach the Gospel" as they call it, and never apply the Christian religion to politics, to business, to the life of the family, or the individual, not even to the church. A gospel? Yes, an admirable gospel for Scribes and Pharasees, and hypocrites—glad tidings of great joy to dishonest traders and politicians. Religion nothing to do with politics; the morality of the New Testament

not to be applied to the dealings of man; the golden rule too precious for daily use? Such a man will "save souls"—preserved in hypocrisy and kept on ice from youth to age. How he can call his idolatry even worshipping the Bible I know not—for you cannot open this Book anywhere, but from its oldest to its newest leaves there rustles forth the most earnest speech in protest against evil and in proclamation of goodness—words which burn even now when they are two or three thousand years old."

But thank God, all men do not demand such meaness of soul and dryness of stuff—they seek after what is sneeringly called the essay or lecture in morals and religion, because their intelligence is not insulted—their religious emotions are quickened, their reasonable ardour is fired thereby. Friends, I counsel you to be of that brave and earnest few. Choose to hear the man who will not put his own soul into your bosom, but will wake the soul that is in you; the man who will give you great and swelling thoughts of God—not the God of popular theology, whose face flames with the fire of anger, and who made the world with predisposition to damn it for evermore—but the God of Jesus—the God of the poor and suffering—the God of mercy and love, who made the world to bless it by saving all His children into the eternal heaven of righteousness. Seek those discourses—call them what they may, sermons, essays, lectures, anything—that will make you ashamed of sin, and strong in the righteousness of duty, that will make you true in all the relations of life, true to yourself, to your family, your neighbour, your nation, your God. Put yourselves under the influence of free strong manly speech—speech that will not delude you with false hopes and ideas, but will inspire you to aim in faith and prayer after lofty achievements; speech that breathes such holy thinking as to surround you with an atmosphere of truth; speech that shall help you in your constant endeavour to complete your manhood in the likeness of God.

"Omnia superat Virtus."



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